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ABSTRACT

These materials are part of a four-module series, "Competence Is for Everyone," designed to specify and reduce limitations on the learning and use of skills that people experience because of their sex or race. The series identifies three areas that function to maintain inequalities: the process of making judgments or appraisals: practices of social institutions in education, employment, and the mass media: and legal precedents and historical antecedents. Appraisal is treated as it occurs with respect to group membership, i.e., sex and minority status. This discussion guide and transcript of a videotape to be used with both the intermediate grades and upper grades, together with the second module, "In the Minority," focus on appraisal of the videotape incidents and individual student reaction to the situations presented. (Author/HLM)

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COMPETENCE IS FOR EVERYONE

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JUDGE ME, NOT MY SHELL
Discussion Guide and Transcript of Videotape

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The second narrative is adapted by permission from Jimmie R. Frazier, "Don't Call Me Gringo!" Parents' Magazine, 47, 1972.

MAY 1 1980

JUDGE ME, NOT MY SHELL*

Discussion Guide

Two narratives based on actual incidents are presented in the videotape. The first narrative is based on an early attempt at school integration in Arkansas. A Black girl attempts to enter a white school and is mobbed. In the second narrative, a white family finds itself in the minority. The family has moved to a Texas-Mexico border town. Most people in this town are Mexican American. The family members recount what it was like for them to be in the minority. The questions focus on types of appraisals in the narratives and their consequences for the individuals involved. They also underscore the similarity of the experience of people in both minority situations.

It is suggested that the viewing be done in two parts so that students can discuss their reactions to the first narrative before viewing the second one. Each discussion should touch on the following areas.

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*This videotape is recommended for use with Unit 2, "In the Minority," upper and intermediate level editions.

- Appraisal elements in the narrative.

- Personal impact on the subject and on others involved in the narrative. This is to include the impact of such an event, if students in the class were to experience it.

- Personal change in the actions of the major character and others in the narrative. This is to include personal change of students in the class if they were to find themselves in such a situation.

- Generalization to other situations. Students should be able to identify similar situations in our society and to discuss the appraisal elements, personal impact, and possible change.

First Narrative

Appraisal Analysis

1. What is the meaning of the poem?

2. How do you think this girl appraised herself as she prepared to go to school?

   a. As a person: well-dressed, hopeful, looking forward to a new experience?

b. Was she aware of the implication of her category membership, her blackness?

c. Was she aware of her parents' concerns? Was she aware of the public attention and concern?

d. Did she feel competent and confident that she could handle the situation?

3. How did the crowd waiting at the school appraise the girl? As a member of a category or as a school child beginning a new school experience?

Personal Impact

1. What impact did this experience have for the learning of skills and of self-concept for the child, her parents, people in the crowd?

2. Did this experience promote understanding and cooperation?

3. Imagine you are the Black girl and this event is happening to you. What would you do? How would you feel?

Personal Change

Imagine that the color of someone's skin did not matter. How would the crowd have treated the girl?

(There would be no crowd. People would see that she was doing the usual things in preparing for school, and that this was a family engaged in activities like any other family. The thought of doing anything would not even have occurred to people in the crowd, and the girl would have been able to go to school in peace.)

Second Narrative

Appraisal Analysis

1. What does the white version of the poem say?

2. What does it mean to say that someone is in the minority?

3. How did the children in this family appraise themselves in relation to the Spanish-speaking children in their school?

4. How did the Spanish-speaking children appraise them?

5. What are the judgments of both groups based on?

Personal Impact

1. How did the appraisal affect what both sets of children did or could participate in?

2. How did both sets of children feel about themselves?

3. Have you ever been in the minority? How did it affect what you were doing? How did you feel about yourself?

Personal Change

1. What would the Anglo-American and Mexican-American children learn about each other if they made task appraisals?

2. How would you have handled the situation if you were the parent or the teacher?

3. Are there other strategies for improving relations? One possible answer is learning about each other's background and appreciating variety in custom, dress, entertainment, etc. Another possibility is sharing skills with each other and learning from each other.

4. Do you think it could be helpful or interesting to speak another language? Bilingual education programs exist in schools across the entire country. Do you think it is important to maintain a person's native language?

5. Can you get information on bilingual-bicultural education programs?

Generalization to Other Situations

1. What are the similarities between the first and second narratives of the videotape?

2. (Upper level only.) What are the similarities between this videotape and "The Rise of Rolag"?

3. What current events are like those shown in the videotapes?

4. What other categories or groups of people are appraised on the basis of visible differences?

JUDGE ME, NOT MY SHELL

Transcript

Enacted in a one-woman dramatization. Spotlight on actress standing on round platform with music stand and masks. Movements of actress suggest feelings of speakers. Actress puts brown mask to face, lifts mask away from face. Poem is recited with an occasional gesture and reference to mask.

Judge me,
not my shell.
My skin is black.
In and of itself
it is neither good nor bad;
it is black.
Like rocks are hard,
leaves are green,
and birds can fly,
my skin is black,
not good or bad.

If you must judge,
then judge my acts.
These can obey the law
or break it;
can be of benefit to you
or harm.
Mostly they are of interest to no one
except myself.
But if you must judge,
then judge my acts.

The night before I was so excited, I couldn't sleep. The next morning I was about the first one up. While I was pressing my black-and-white dress--Mama had made it for me to wear the first day of school--my little brother turned on the TV set. They started talking about a large crowd of people gathered at the school. The man on TV said he wondered if we were going to show up that morning. Mother called from the kitchen, where she was fixing breakfast: "Turn that TV off!" She was so upset and worried. I wanted to comfort her, so I said: "Mama, don't worry."

Daddy was walking back and forth from room to room with a sad expression. He was chewing on his pipe and he had a cigar in his hand, but he didn't light either one. It would have been funny, only he was so nervous.

Then Mother called us into the living room. She said we should have a word of prayer. Then I caught the bus and got off a block from the school. There was a large crowd of people standing across the street from the soldiers guarding Central High. As I got near, suddenly the crowd became very quiet. For a moment all I could hear was the shuffling of their feet. Then someone shouted: "Here she comes; get ready." Then the crowd began to follow me, calling me names. I still wasn't afraid. Just a little nervous. Then my knees started to shake all of a sudden, and I wondered if I could make it to the center entrance a block away. It was the longest block I've ever walked in my whole life. But I still wasn't afraid because all the time I kept thinking that the guards would protect me.

When I got right in front of the school, it looked so big. I went up to one of the guards. He looked straight ahead and didn't move to let me pass him. Just then another guard let some white students through.

The crowd got quiet. I guess they were waiting to see what was going to happen next. I went up to the guard who had let the white students through. He too didn't move and, when I tried to squeeze past him, he raised his bayonet, and then the other guards closed in and they raised their bayonets, and they all glared at me with a mean look and I was very frightened and didn't know what to do.

Just then the crowd came closer and closer, and they started shouting: "Get out of here. You're not going to get into our school. Get out of here."

I tried to find a friendly face somewhere in the mob--someone who maybe would help. I looked in the face of an old woman and it seemed a kind face, but when I looked at her again, she spat on me.

They came closer and closer and they kept yelling ugly, dirty, mean names. I spotted a bench at the bus stop and I thought: "If I could only make it to that bench, I will be safe." I don't know why the bench seemed a safe place to me, but I kept thinking: "If I could only make it to that bench, I will be safe."

When I finally got there, I sat down and I cried, and the crowd started shouting all over again. And I just can't understand why.

(Actress puts white mask to face, lifts mask away from face. Poem is recited with an occasional gesture and reference to mask.)

Judge me,
not my shell.
My skin is white.
In and of itself
it is neither good nor bad;
it is white.

Like rocks are hard,
leaves are green,
and birds can fly,
my skin is white,
not good or bad.

If you must judge,
then judge my acts.
These can obey the law
or break it;
can be of benefit to you
or harm.
Mostly they are of interest to no one
except myself.
But if you must judge,
then judge my acts.

(Actress picks up a letter and reads.)

Dear Friend: I need to share this experience with you. Two weeks ago, Billy, the youngest, greeted me with: "Mother! Mother! I hate this place. Oh, Mom, do we have to live here?" He was very upset when he came home.

I put my arms around him, hugged him, tried to soothe his hurt feelings. I wiped the tears from his cheeks. I asked him what had happened, thinking that maybe I could help. There was a flood of words, anger, frustration, and hurt. He was trying to tell me how much he disliked being in the minority, how it is a strange new feeling for all of us, being just a typical, white, middle-class, Anglo-Saxon family.

When we moved to this Texas/Mexico town, I knew the children would have to make some big adjustments. It's a small community where Mexican Americans outnumber the rest of us ten to one. I had thought I understood about minority groups and why they often feel as they do, but I soon discovered there was a lot left to learn. Over the past year, each member of our family has found out how it feels to be a part of a minority. We're fortunate; we're not trapped for life in this role. But from this time on, we will see with clearer eyes some of the problems that Mexicans, Blacks, Puerto Ricans, and others face in our country.

When we moved here, I knew that the children would miss their old friends and have the usual problems because of changing schools. I wasn't worried, though. They had adjusted beautifully before. But I hadn't thought about how it would be for them to be different from the other kids.

One day I received a phone call from the kindergarten where Billy was enrolled. His teacher was upset with his behavior and said that unless he showed some improvements, he could not continue in school.

I was really embarrassed to hear what the problem was. When the children had to line up for recess, my son refused to walk with his partner. He would stamp his foot and scream that he was allergic to Mexicans and that he would never walk with them.

What had happened to my happy, fair-minded child? Where did he learn such prejudice?

Suddenly it dawned on me that all our children had been unusually quiet about their school activities. They weren't coming home full of chatter about teachers and friends. I suppose I had been so busy I didn't notice this change. Now I realized we had a problem we had all really needed to discuss.

That night at supper we held a family conference, and Robert my husband and I began to question the children about their classes and their new friends. At first we got the old "everything's okay" bit; but after a while, we really began to talk. Words came pouring out as the children began telling us of all the things that were upsetting them and of how homesick they were for their old friends and classmates. But it was more than that.

Their list of complaints grew. To begin with, they were disturbed that all Anglo students had to take Spanish; they didn't care if they could speak Spanish. The children didn't think this was fair.

They discussed how few Anglo students there were in each class and how much they disliked being the odd ones. They resented the snickers and laughter when they couldn't understand Spanish. They felt as if the other students were always whispering about them, and it made them furious to be called "Gringo."

What should we do? How could we deal with this anger? Somehow, there had to be a way to make our stay in this border town a positive experience.

Finally I asked them: "Do you like being in the minority?"

There was a loud chorus of "NO!"

Then I asked if maybe we weren't getting a firsthand lesson in what it's like to be different. For a moment there was total silence, then heads began to nod, and the oldest said that he'd never thought of it that way before and that he was learning a new lesson: the fact that nobody appreciated what he had to offer, and that the Mexican kids didn't want him in Little League, and it didn't matter that he was a good player; nobody would even let him try.

That was an important clue. We felt that we could start to get to know another culture and appreciate what people can do. And maybe we could help by first learning Spanish. We realized that if we see what people have to offer, then it doesn't matter if you're Mexican American, or Anglo-Saxon American, or if your skin is dark or light. *(Fade-out.)*

(Actress puts brown/white mask to face, lifts mask away from face.)

Judge me,
not my shell.
In and of itself
it is neither good nor bad,
just skin.
Like rocks are hard,
leaves are green,
and birds can fly,
my skin is simply skin.